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TEN YEARS' EXPERIENCE IN ILLINOIS

BY MISS JANE ADDAMS.

I shall try to tell you some of our experiences in Illinois in relation to child labor legislation, and how we were finally led away from merely restrictive measures into all sorts of undertakings in trying to provide education and recreation for the children.

In 1901, Illinois had only one child labor provision upon its books, and that referred only to children working in mines. In 1903 the protection of the law was extended to children working in sweatshops and factories. At once it became evident that Illinois must modify the compulsory education law, and we finally equipped ourselves with a splendid parental school. We discovered that certain boys who did not get on very well in the ordinary schools, when they were sent out in the country to this parental school, developed a taste for farming, for stock growing and for all sorts of things, simply because they had something to do with their hands. Several years later the Illinois Child Labor Law was extended to include children working in mercantile establishments and offices, and at that time we were able to get a provision that no child could receive a certificate unless he was able to read and write.

A very astonishing thing happened as a result of that provision. Certain schools, largely those in the foreign communities, which had been quite large enough before this provision was enacted, suddenly became filled to overflowing. I remember one school in the stockyards which increased from 50 to 150 in the fifth grade alone, and the increases came right along in all of the lower grades, for even little creatures of four were entered as aged six, in order that they might more speedily learn to read and write and more early attain the advanced age of fourteen.

And then later, through the juvenile court, it was discovered that a surprising number of children got into difficulties, some of them out of school hours and many others after their long hours of work in the factories and shops.

And finally it was said by good citizens all over the city, "It is

foolish that children should be arrested and brought into the juvenile court for playing ball on the streets; it is very absurd that a child should get his name so close to the criminal records of Cook County merely because he obstructs traffic playing leapfrog. Something must be done to get these boys a place to play."

So gradually we have built up in Chicago a system of small parks, each park—and here I will boast a little, in true Chicago spirit—each one of these small parks is equipped with a field house costing \$90,000. It has in it a gymnasium for boys and another for girls; it has in it club rooms, public library stations, dance halls, in which young people may come together and have decent recreation. Outside of these park houses, in the immediate vicinity, are open air gymnasia, swimming pools and athletic fields, and all of those things to which young people are so quickly attracted.

At the end of three years this is what happened. It was discovered that in the region of these small parks where once many boys had been arrested, the number was gradually lessened, and at the end of five years it was reduced more than a third. Children were not arrested, simply because they had the outlet for their energies which the small parks afforded.

Naturally, some of the taxpayers had objected to these small parks; the taxpayer always objects when his taxes go up suddenly and he does not quite understand the reason why. We were able, however, to say to those taxpayers of Chicago: "It is true that your park tax has increased, but it is also true that your county tax, that tax which took care of the juvenile delinquents, has decreased, so that at the present moment in spite of the fact that fifteen of these very expensive field houses are being managed in Chicago, you are paying less taxes than you paid five years ago."

Now, it seems to many of us that that is one of the results of that child labor legislation which began so long ago, in 1901, because this is a curious thing in regard to children: if you study their needs, if you feel identified with their futures, if you are mortified when they go wrong, you are gradually led out into all sorts of activities in their behalf.

Then we have found also that a surprising number of boys come to grief during the first two years after they go to work, boys between the ages of fourteen and sixteen. We are slowly discovering that many of these boys are badly placed. A boy who is

big and clumsy and likes to do outdoor things, to lift with his heavy muscles, while he imagines himself a pirate on the high seas, does not work very well when he is put into a factory to fasten eyelets into shoes at the rate of two cents a case.

So we are beginning to study the vocations of these children. We are discovering that children must be prepared for the things which they can do best, and some wise person must determine at what age, at what time and with what temperament a child can most easily be inducted into a given vocation. This again is reacting upon the schools in a surprising way.

Again we are able to go to Mr. Taxpayer and say to him: We will guarantee that we will reduce the delinquency among these boys between fourteen and sixteen, at this trying period when they are adjusting themselves to industry, if you will establish these vocation bureaus for all of the eighth grade children who are obliged to go to work; and if they haven't had the proper education in the public schools, we beg of you to so modify the schools, or to so add other schools that they may be taken care of and the city not only saved the expense of these juvenile delinquents but the parents saved the heartbreak which an erring child always brings, and the boys themselves saved the chagrin and the disgrace and the discouragement which going wrong always entails.

And so I say again, that beginning with your merely restrictive child labor law, you are entering at the same time upon a most fascinating road towards all sorts of other things which a great city will provide for its children. And this one message I can bring quite definitely, that while it seems as though you are reducing your industrial assets, while it appears you are increasing the taxes of the city, looked at from the point of view of twenty or twenty-five years, you are in reality increasing your industrial assets and decreasing your taxation. You will gradually spend your money more wisely and more intelligently; you will enter into a friendship and an understanding with the child, so that you will realize what he needs at certain times and under certain conditions; you will first of all be ashamed that you ever thought he ought to labor to support grown up people, and then you will wonder that you ever thought he could walk along the street like a sober deacon when he was longing to play all sorts of fascinating games, and thirdly you will discover that if you would fit him for industry,

you must begin to consider the child and the industry together, and make some sort of a connection between the two.

In our own neighborhood at Hull House we have discovered another thing about these boys. We have had representing us in the common council of the city of Chicago for about twenty-five years, a certain alderman in Chicago who has a rather unsavory reputation. We have tried at various times to dislodge him, but we have never succeeded, and we have finally made up our minds that unless he grows ambitious and wants to go to Congress, we never shall get rid of him in the nineteenth ward.

A little study of the children of the nineteenth ward, especially of the boys, divulged this: that the boys who went around the ward in gangs—and curiously enough every boy does belong to a gang, especially if he be an Irish boy, from whom our politicians are mostly made—were learning the very method, the very technique most useful to the kind of alderman with which our ward is blessed.

The boy at the head of the gang in Chicago is called the “song-and-dance-man;” in Boston they call him the “councilor.” I do not know why in either case, but that is what they do call them. This “song-and-dance-man” has it put up to him to provide something for the gang to do all the time, and if he can provide something on the edge of law-breaking, which is very exciting, he is all the more successful.

When he grows a little older, he keeps on with this gang. He tells them the saloons which are protected, so that they may go there without fear of being interrupted by the police. He tells them the gambling places which are quite safe, and he gives them the tip in this thing and that thing, even to the justice before whom they may appear and be protected by the alderman.

All this is exactly the training for the kind of alderman we have in our ward. He takes care of his friends who vote for him and sees that the law does not press too hard on them; and if they do get into trouble, some higher power, through his influence will get them out again.

We gradually discovered that we were training up that type of politician right in the city of Chicago, one set of boys after another whose only idea of political association and civic righteousness was the sort of thing which they learned in the gang, and which prepared them directly for this sort of political life.

Every settlement has long and sometimes dreary lessons on civics, and the constitution of the United States, and all the rest of it, and the boy will listen to all of them, if you can catch him, but what he really learns of life is the thing he learns with his companions, and the way he learns to act with other people is the basis of his future political relationships.

So we said if we could break up these gangs, it would be a long step in the right direction. And lo and behold, when we had the playgrounds, while we were wondering how we could break up the gangs, the gangs broke up themselves. If six or eight or ten gangs enter into a playground at the same time, the man at the head of the playground has only to be concerned that each one has an equal chance; "that the liberty of each" in the words of Herbert Spencer, "is limited only by the like liberty of all." So if one gang wants to use the apparatus too long or if one wants to rule the playground, the man in charge says: "Not at all, Mr. Song-and-dance-man, this is a public playground and belongs equally to all the boys in this neighborhood." And you begin to give quite another notion of political life to the hundreds of boys who use the playground, as they find that they are obliged to take their turns in the use of the apparatus which has been supplied by the city. And very soon they learn that only as a boy distinguishes himself by actual achievements such as boys so much admire, the turning around and around an innumerable number of times on the bars, or something else, which is quite different from political manipulation—only in some such way as that is he able to win the admiration of his fellows.

We have discovered that in these playgrounds of ours we are breaking up a certain type of politician who has so long reigned in Chicago. And we also believe that when city children are free from the premature labor, free from that dull kind of education which has no relation to the life which comes after, when they have a chance to use some initiative, to plan for their own futures in relation to the things that they like to do, that we are going to have such an aroused community in Chicago that at length our moral energy and our civic enterprise will equal our long-famed commercial energy and our huge, unwieldy bulk.